

## Problems of the post-truth and how to visualize the idea of God

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**Abstract:** The article attempts to visualize the dangers of the post-truth era, while relativizing the relative to argue that the postulates of this era are irrational. The only way to understand a moral structure in a post-truth society is through imposition, persuasion or manipulation. In all cases, morality is relegated to the subjective. The argument is constructed based on the law of non-contradiction, stating that the truth exists, and its characteristics are universal, static and logical.

**Keywords:** post-truth, Christ, morality

### INTRODUCTION

Post-modernity presents us with a Christianity that is built as a nest intertwined between customs and myths, intertwined between perceptions adaptable to circumstances, a Christianity built in a culture ready to justify any use and belief that arises from the peoples, from the “ancestral wisdom”. It is easy to see how the Western culture of post-modernity has seen itself ready to adapt, to intuitively accommodate between truth and post-truth, as it suits them, as it wishes, as it feels. The post-truth era presents us with an adaptable, changing Western culture and a cultural Christianity ready to justify all these changes, soon to be built as a platform of acceptance to all use, to all beliefs, to all cultural adaptation.

The post-truth era created a wide space for tolerance of everything, with groups that have taken Christianity as a platform to justify their new positions, in a kind of act of atonement: everything is justifiable, everything is adaptable, everything is useful to justify. The post-truth era gives us a vague vision of reality: the conception of truth has gone from being a principle, relevant to everything and everyone, to being a dynamic, adaptable idea, almost an unnecessary vision. At the same time, everything and nothing can be justifiable and accepted,

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depending on the interlocutors and circumstances. Everything is relative, in this way, nothing can be affirmed because cultural relativity only accepts, while sometimes trying to justify itself with the adaptation of a post-modern Jesus.

This essay tries to visualize the dangers of the post-truth era with its excessive relativities, so it can be shown that the ‘logic’ of this era finds no foundation, but only an adaptation to each circumstance, and a growing acceptance of all cultural uses. At the same time, the essay aims to recreate the rational justification for the existence of truth related to the existence of God. This involves the existence of universal principles, neither adaptable nor useable, found by contrasting truth with post-truth. The claims of the essay are presented as a colossal task; however, we find encouragement when we review the works of Ravi Zacharias (2000; 2008; 2012), John C. Lennox (2007; 2011; 2015), Frank Turek (2010; 2014), and Gregory Koukl (2011; 2017), who have worked systematically to understand the truth in a rational way, while exposing the irrationality of the postulates of the post-truth era.

## POST-TRUTH AND CULTURE

In 2016, Oxford Dictionaries selected the word “post-truth” as the ‘word of the year’, as the word of greatest use and opinion. The news did not surprise; it was to be expected, since its use has exponentially increased. Publication truth does not refer to one event after another, and the composition of words does not have a perception of subsequent events, but of relevance, that is, the truth has lost relevance over time. It is considered that the word composition was for the first time used by Steve Tesich (1992), in an essay published by *The Nation*. However, Ralph Keyes popularized the term referring to it as the quality that something seemed true, or could be perceived as true, even if it is not (Keyes 2004). To this definition, he adds that one researcher after another confirmed that it has become as common as scratching the stitches. The true publication is configured as statements, arguments or events that may not be real, no matter; what is relevant is that these arguments or events feel true, although the evidence shows otherwise.

The true publication is made and remade according to the need, insofar as the need requires its use to justify cultural uses, individual reasons or even public impositions. Thus, it is not difficult to find examples clearly representing these cultural and individual uses,

specific or ethnic impositions. For example, female genital mutilation, death penalty for adultery, fellatio performed by children, state authoritarianism, etc.

On female genital mutilation, the World Health Organization shows data that are chilling<sup>1</sup>. Between 100 and 140 million girls and women worldwide have undergone female genital mutilation; in 27 African countries, and Yemen, more than 101 million girls over 10 years age live with the consequences of mutilation; immigrants from Africa and Yemen continue these practices in countries such as Australia, Canada, the United States, Europe and New Zealand (Organización Mundial de la Salud 2013: 2). Female genital mutilation is carried out for various cultural reasons: initiation of adulthood; to enter the public life of the community, expecting discrimination for those women who do not do it; in various populations, this practice has been linked to local pre-Islamic traditions; for reasons that involve sanitary beliefs and beauty; control of sexuality, “to curb the supposed intrinsically exacerbated sexual desire of women [...] there is a belief that if the clitoris is not removed it will grow too much, looking like a penis” (Asociación Mujeres entre Mundos 2016: 21-22).

Another example of cultural uses is built around the death penalty; and one of the most visible cases, death by adultery, it is common to find it in certain cultures of the Middle East. Debates about this use are very common in different human rights commissions. In fact, during the United Nations forum’s debate on the death penalty in 1994, the countries that opposed any resolution on the subject were Malaysia, Bangladesh, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Egypt, Iran and Jordan. Sudan described capital punishment as a divine right according to some religions, in particular Islam (Schabas 2000, 229). Any attempt to debate this kind of practices receives a fierce denunciation, alluding to respect for cultural values.

On the other hand, in Strickland-Bosav, located in the north of Papua New Guinea, there are several indigenous groups, and among them, the Kaluli perform various rituals, one of them recreates neighboring environments with songs and dances. These rituals try to remember memories of lost beings. For this, there are two types of people, the dancers and the hosts, who, grieved by the pain, begin to

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<sup>1</sup> The word ‘chilling’ has been used with a specific intention: it connotes the existence of a universal idea of good and evil, of just and unjust, goodness and cruelty, concepts that cannot justify their existence in the post-truth era.

cry and cry violently, until some of them vent their pain by grasping torches of burning resin and dipping them furiously on the shoulders of the singing dancer (Knauff 1985, 324). The ritual is considered successful when the hosts have been lost in despair and the dancers have been severely burned. In the same Strickland-Bosav, all indigenous groups in the area believe that children must be “inseminated to reach adulthood, but the mode of transmission of semen is different in each society” (Ibid, 328). Anal sex is practiced among the Kaluli communities, fellatio is practiced in the Etoro community, and semen is spread among the novice in the Onabasulu community. At the same time, the customs of the Kaluli and Onabasulu seem repulsive to the Etoro.

Finally, the most visible example of state authoritarianism is that of North Korea; the dictatorships of Kim family and the Korean Workers’ Party have created a state of systematic repression. The Kim Jong-Un regime has been characterized by public executions, arbitrary arrests and forced labor; tighten travel restrictions to prevent North Koreans from escaping and seeking refuge abroad; and systematically persecuting those with religious contacts inside and outside the country. Reports of Human Rights Watch (2017) and of the U.S. Department of State (2018) mention systematic use of murder, slavery, torture, imprisonment, rape, forced abortion and acts of sexual violence.

Cultural differences move and frighten many, yet these reactions open the door to relevant questions: Why should these cultural uses scare us, if the post-truth advocates cultural tolerance? Why judge those cultural uses, if there are no absolute truths, if there are no absolute standards? By what right can moral standards be imposed if they are not absolute? These questions expose the biggest problem of argumentation in the post-truth era: there is no truth, therefore, there are no moral principles; so, there is no justification for judging any person or culture, and there is no need for punitive laws.

## A POST-TRUTH CHRIST

In the post-truth era, many people have tried to justify themselves by adapting a “Christ” who tolerates and does not judge, who accepts and does not deny; a “Christ” who adapts to cultural changes. In the same way, an attempt is made to build a church that adapts, that tolerates, that accepts, and simultaneously demands a community, which also adapts to different lifestyles. Obvious cases of these attempts at

justification and pressure for adaptation are homosexuality and abortion.

The case of homosexuality, as an accepted way of life in some Christian churches in Great Britain, has been studied by Stephen Hunt who, citing Robert Nugent and Jeannine Gramick, mentions that homosexuality can be compared to a thorn caught in the throat of the church that cannot expel or swallow completely (Hunt 2002, 1). Writings of these authors show that the acceptance of homosexuality in Christian churches unfolds as a sociological event, as the achievement of pressure from some social movements. Christian homosexuality is a result of social pressure and not of the acceptance of universal principles, or by acceptance of the existence of truth<sup>2</sup>.

Social and cultural pressure reveals the second problem in argumentation in the post-truth era: the affirmation that everything is a social construction; and, therefore, as a social construction, the affirmation of the strongest, the most adapted or of the majority, becomes the moral standard, which involves, again, the adaptation of the standards. The problem of the majorities is evident: the majorities are mobile and changing, the consideration of something true depends on the construction of the majorities, and the truth is also mobile and changing.

On the other hand, abortion has become the battle flag of several feminist movements that have based their arguments on the freedom of women to decide on their bodies, on their health and life, on the discrimination against women gender (Center for Reproductive Rights 2011). These arguments served to create certain justifications for legally accepting abortion. However, in the case of the structures of international legality, Pierro Tozzi (2010, 6) observes that no United Nations treaty contains the word “abortion”, nor can a “right” to abortion be inferred from “common sense”, from the words of any treatise. Social pressure has caused Christian groups, such as the Presbyterian Church of the United States, to accept abortion. In the statement of principles, it is mentioned that a woman’s considered decision to terminate a pregnancy may be a morally acceptable decision, although certainly not the only or required one. Possible supporting circumstances would include medical evidence of severe

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<sup>2</sup> The Old Testament (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13) and also the New Testament (Romans 1: 26-28; 1 Timothy 1: 9-10) refer to homosexuality as acts contrary to the will of God for the humans.

physical or mental deformity, conception as a result of rape or incest, or conditions under which the physical or mental health of a woman or child would be seriously threatened (Central Presbyterian Church 2013).

The world abortion laws map of recent years shows that the world is divided into two: a first group made up of those countries that have fully legalized abortion, and a second that prohibits abortion of one or another way. The second group includes most of Latin America, Africa and Asia Minor. In addition, these regions are added to Ireland, Great Britain, Poland, Finland, Iceland, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, and Japan. These countries prohibit abortion except in cases such as incest, rape, or possible death of the mother, and most require father's permission.

Social movements in favor of abortion have tried to build the idea of legality synchronized with the idea of morality. In this conception, it is intended to suggest that the legality of abortion shows the morality of the nation. However, this argument hints at the third problem in argumentation in the post-truth era: legality does not necessarily represent morality. This statement appears as a no-brainer when analyzing the historical development of the legal precepts of nations. The problem of legality frames the post-truth within a dynamic development of legal standards; it frames the post-truth within a changing historical evolution, an evolution that is sometimes seen as contradictory, and sometimes, as coherent.

These two examples, homosexuality and abortion, have served as pressure to build a version of Christianity adapted to post-truth, which evolves in the same way as societies in the post-modern cultures. This version of Christianity, adaptable to cultural dynamism, becomes one more cog in the post-truth era because its precepts are changing, adaptable, submissive to culture, and they fall into subjectivity, opinions and tastes. The examples also present the paradox into which certain social movements fall: the need to be justified by the same tendency that their behavior accuses. This justification shows the need to be accepted and, at the same time, the will not to change; but, on the contrary, to make Christianity to change and to adapt to its conduct. It is a paradox on the need for a spiritual justification; and for this, the most viable option is social pressure to achieve an adapted Christian faith.

## POST-TRUTH PROBLEMS

The writing has presented three post-truth arguments falling into logical problems, namely: cultural respect, social pressure and legality. All point to the same argument: the relativity of truth, the relativity of morality and, therefore, the nonexistence of both.

On the one hand, cultural respect leads to accepting any cultural use such as rape, murder, castration, etc. Why freak out, if the post-truth defends cultural tolerance? The judgment of any cultural use falls into absurdity because there are no absolute truths. Since there are no absolute moral principles, the post-truth cannot justify the judgment of any act, the judgment of any human being.

On the other hand, social pressure is built as an instrument that aims to build the idea of morality through imposition. If everything is a social construction, the truth is built in the context of the strongest – the group of people who manage to impose own visions to others. In many cases, the ideas of the majority become the standard of morality. In other cases, it may be the force of the minority that prevails over a population. In both cases, be they majorities or minorities, the imposition shows the truth as a relative, changing idea. Truth and, therefore, morality are relegated to a struggle of forces. The consideration of something true is relegated to the construction of the majority and, like these mobiles and changers, the truth is not absolute, but depends on the strongest.

Finally, the post-truth presents morality in relation to the legal system; the post-truth frames morality within legality, so behaviors are moral or not as long as they can be legalized. In this way, the post-truth is developed within a historical evolution of legality, within a changing, dynamic and contradictory evolution. This argument is problematic: legality for some means illegality for others. Who is moral and who is not? On what legal parameters do we base our judgment of morality? The dynamics of legality show the same problem: a changing morality and, therefore, a non-existent morality.

Different attempts to understand morality from the post-truth lead us to consider the same problem: the dynamics of society has constructed historical parameters that are diverse, they are changing and, therefore, non-existent. If truth moves from one side to another, it changes without problem and adapts to each culture, then it has disappeared. Therefore, there is no justification for entering value judgments; there is no reasonable argument to justify the judgment, the criticism, the way of thinking or acting. There is only the law of

imposition, of persuasion and of manipulation. As long as social groups can impose, persuade or manipulate cultural conceptions, truth continues to be relegated to the field of opinion, pleasure, and to the subjectivity.

As there are no objective parameters to consider that something is true, to consider that something is moral, the post-truth is lost in its tolerance attempt. It can be no tolerance in the post-truth spectrum for an obvious reason: if everything is tolerable, the reasoning set forth in this essay should also be tolerated; but, if that was to happen, if the reasoning in this essay is also tolerated, the post-truth contradicts itself because truth and non-truth cannot coexist in the same space. Therefore, in the post-truth context, if social groups do not tolerate the argument of this article, they contradict their principle of tolerance; on the contrary, in the post-truth context, if social groups do tolerate the argument in this article, they contradict themselves because truth cannot coexist with non-truth.

The arguments put forward in the post-truth era fall into logical contradictions. The only conclusion is the systematic irrationality in which this era's "principles" have been built. Without objective parameters, the absurd governs reason. Without objective parameters, the cognition is lost and the inconsistency appears as the primary element. Thus, the post-truth lives on the unintelligible, it lives just on the subjective.

If the above has any logical value, the next questions are obvious: What is [the] truth? And: How to get it? These questions also lead us to consider the existence of the immaterial; if a truth and a morality were not built in society, they are not built in the material but are found in the field of metaphysics (in its meaning as "beyond the physical").

#### WHAT OR WHO IS THE TRUTH?

If we accept that the truth exists and it is objective, then we accept that the truth is outside of cultural constructions, and of material forces; it is in the field of the immaterial. Truth lives in the realm of the immaterial because it was not built or created by material entities, and yet it emerges in the realm of the material because we can appreciate it even if we do not fully understand it.

The laws of logic lead us to appreciate the truth in its tributes; the law of non-contradiction, the law of the excluded medium, and the principle of identity lead us to visualize the truth and deny the lies or relative truths. Through the laws of logic, we can observe the attributes



of truth, to say: truth cannot deny itself (law of non-contradiction); truth has no intermediate or relative (law of the excluded medium); and truth is always the same (identity principle). Attributes of truth can be visualized as follows:  $p$  and  $\sim p$  cannot be true at the same time, or,  $p$  is true and  $\sim p$  is not true, or,  $p$  is not true and  $\sim p$  is true (law of non-contradiction);  $p$  and  $\sim p$  have no intermediates, there are no tertiary propositions ( $p \vee \sim p$ ); and,  $p$  is identical with itself, ( $p=p$ ),  $p$  is always  $p$ . Although Thomas Aquinas proposes “*principia essentialia rerum sunt nobis ignota*” (“the essential principles of things are unknown to us”), the truth can be known in its attributes using the laws of logic.

The laws of logic lead us to appreciate that truth is exclusive, absolute, static and it transcends material construction. Truth is exclusive because it does not accept relative negations or truths; it is absolute because it cannot change; it is static because it is always the same, and it does not come from material construction because it is not part of cultural processes. These attributes provide information that necessarily eliminates the pretensions of relative, dynamic, or material truths. In this sense, any statement, which bases its conception of truth on cultural, dynamic or relative constructions, falls on the terrain of the illogical and, therefore, on the terrain of non-truth: if it is not true, it is a lie; there are no intermediate spaces. Thus, truth and post-truth cannot coexist. For Tuomas Tahko (2009), the exclusivity of the truth is evident; the emphasis is on the mutual exclusivity of having a certain attribute and lacking that attribute at the same time. In fact, the idea can be expressed without using negation at all: the mutual exclusivity of certain properties is evident even without the concept of negation.

In addition, to recognize the truth’s attributes through the laws of logic, the accessibility towards truth is one through non-material processes. Such non-material processes are known as religion, trying to give ways of approaching God or divinity. In this sense, God / divinity becomes the Truth that transcends material processes, the Truth that is absolute and exclusive. The exclusivity of Truth is an inescapable characteristic. To illustrate this characteristic, it is useful to refer to the ancient Indian parable of the blind men and the elephant. In the fable, a king asks six blind men to determine what they are touching by feeling different parts of an elephant’s body. A blind man feels a leg and says that the elephant is like a pillar; the one who feels the tail says that the elephant is like a rope; the one who feels the trunk says that the elephant is like a branch of a tree; the one who feels the ear says that

the elephant is like a fan; the one who feels the belly says that the elephant is like a wall; and the one who feels the tusk says that the elephant is like a pipe. Then the king concludes: you are all right.

The parable of the blind men and the elephant is used to argue that all ways of approaching Truth are acceptable, that all religions are true, and that all comes to the same God. However, the parable presents several problems, saying that we don't know which religion is true (as an act of humility). Saying that none of the religions gets the truth and that no one can be sure that there is a God, it assumes that you have a kind of knowledge to simply say that no other person does, that no other religion does. It is a kind of arrogance to say that no one can know the truth because it is a universal affirmation of the truth. Say: No one can make universal statements of universal truth - that is a universal statement of truth. No one can see the whole truth - you couldn't know that unless you think you see the whole truth. And so you are doing the same thing that you say religious people shouldn't be doing (Keller and Garland 2016).

It is common to find the idea that all religions lead to the same God. However, this statement falls on a deep problem: it is assumed that all religions have the same conception of God, while, at the same time, it is assumed that the ways to get God are not exclusive. The problem is indisputable: while Jesus is God to Christianity, Jesus is only a prophet to Islam, etc. Religions have different conceptions of God; therefore, not all religions lead us to the same God; different paths lead us to different gods.

The statement that all paths lead to the same God acts as a parallel to the statement that there are relative truths leading us to visualize the Truth. In both cases, the multiple paths, like relative truths, fall into a problem of logic: if there are relative truths, the Truth does not exist; if there are multiple paths, the path does not exist. Truths, like paths, are different, with different conceptions of who/what God is, and with different conceptions of origin, destiny, morality and purpose. Therefore, it is illogical to propose that  $p=\sim p$ . The exclusivity of Truth, as the way to reach it, follows from the acceptance that Truth is absolute, God is absolute, and the way to find It is unique. Thus, there is only one Truth, and only one way.

If the post-truth arguments are illogical, because there cannot be multiple truths, but only one, as it has been tried to demonstrate in the previous paragraphs, then the Truth, exclusive in its essence, must be logical. If Truth is logical, we implicitly accept the existence of a logic

that is immutable, absolute, outside of time and space. So, since this logic could not have been created in matter, it must exist outside of time and space; it must be an infinite, immutable, an absolute logos.

Truth is the absolute logos, which is appreciable through the laws of logic. Logos is God, and this can be appreciated by every human being because every human being has been provided with reason, working through the laws of logic. Thus, God is the absolute logos. Jesus is conceptualized as an infinite, immutable and absolute logos; he is the “verb” in the Gospel of John (1: 1). In the beginning, the Word (Λόγος) already existed, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Λόγος (Logos) enjoys the attributes of truth: to be outside the space and time because, existing before the creation of matter; to be absolute and immutable. John lets us know that this Logos was with God in an intimate relationship, and is God.

Thus, the only possible path to justify morality is through Truth, that is, through the existence of Logos/God. Without Truth, morality is relegated to the relative. It is only through Logos that morality can be sustained and have justification; morality cannot exist outside Logos. In this way, morality has become a useful argumentative instrument to come to appreciate the existence of Logos that is free from the limitations of time and space.

#### FINAL REMARKS

This essay has tried to show the dangers that the post-truth era’s postulates do by putting things into perspective; so the irrationality of these postulates could be argued. This is evident, because cultural respect, social pressure and legality lead us to the same point: the impossible justification for any conception of morality.

Problems of the post-truth postulates point to the relativity of truth; and, by consequence, to the relativity of morality. The only way to understand a moral structure in post-truth society is through imposition, persuasion or/and manipulation. In all cases, morality is relegated to the subjective.

Thus, it has been proposed that the post-truth arguments are illogical, because multiple truths can’t be, but only one. This Truth is the Logos, outside space and time, because It exists before the creation of matter. And this Logos is God.

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